

Message Text

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SUBJECT: UNION CONVENTION (CNTU)

1. THE CONFEDERATION OF NATIONAL TRADE UNIONS (CNTU) CONCLUDED ITS CONVENTION IN MONTREAL OVER WEEKEND, WITH LITTLE NEW TO SHOW IN WAY OF POLICIES. PRE-CONVENTION BUILD UP HAD LED OBSERVERS TO BELIEVE THAT UNION MIGHT BE READY TO FACE ISSUE OF WHERE IT SHOULD STAND ON QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE, AND TO TAKE PRELIMINARY STEPS IN MOVEMENT TOWARD ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIALIST-LABOR PARTY IN QUEBEC. INSTEAD, UNION MEMBERS SPENT MOST OF THEIR TIME IN DEMONSTRATIONS-FOUR DURING WEEK- AND FINALLY ENDORESED A PAPER WHICH AVOIDED POSITION ON ISSUE OF NATIONAL UNITY.

2. FROM VIEWPOINT OF NATIONAL INTEREST, CNTU'S CRITICISM OF PARTI QUEBECOIS AND FAILURE TO FACE ISSUE OF QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE WERE MOST IMPORTANT. PRIOR TO CONVENTION, CNTU COMMITTEE HAD PREPARED PAPER CRITICIZING SECRECY IN WHICH PARTI QUEBECOIS WAS CARRYING ON PREPARATIONS FOR REFERENDUM AND ABSENCE OF INFORMATION FROM PQ ON NATURE AND CONTENTS OF SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION IT ENVISAGED. CNTU HAS ALSO OBJECTED

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TO REFERENDUM STRATEGY OF PQ IN ESTABLISHING RULES WHICH LIMIT PARTICIPATION OF UNIONS IN REFERENDUM DEBATE AND WHICH MAY ALLOW WORKERS TO VOTE ONLY FOR OR AGAINST, WITH NO INTERMEDIARY OPTIONS. PRELIMINARY POLICY PAPER RECOMMENDED DISCUSSION OF EFFECTS THAT VARIOUS TYPES OF ARRANGEMENTS, SUCH AS CUSTOMS AND MONETARY UNIONS, COMMON MARKETS, AND CLOSER COMMERCIAL TIES WITH US, MIGHT HAVE ON QUEBEC WORKERS. BUT MOST ISSUES WERE SIDE-

STEPPED IN FINAL POLICY PAPER ENDORSED BY DELEGATES WHICH RECOMMENDED THAT CNTU DELAY TAKING POSITION UNTIL MORE INFORMATION WAS AVAILABLE. UNDER PRESENT PLANS, CNTU WOULD HOLD SPECIAL CONVENTION NO LATER THAN JUNE, 1979 TO TAKE A STAND ON REFERENDUM ISSUE.

3. OTHER UNION BUSINESS WAS CONCERNED WITH RE-ELECTION OF PRESIDENT NORBERT RODRIQUE TO ANOTHER TERM, ENDORSEMENT OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION THAT WORKERS HAVE RIGHT TO STRIKE COMPANIES THAT FAIL TO IMPLEMENT SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS, AND SOME CRITICISM OF PQ'S "SUBSERVIENCE" TO US FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS INTERESTS. DEMONSTRATIONS WERE HELD TO SUPPORT CNTU'S EFFORTS TO REPLACE UPHOLSTERERS UNION OF NORTH AMERICA AS REPRESENTATIVE OF WORKERS AT COMMONWEALTH PLYWOOD, UNDER STRIKE FOR NINE MONTHS; TO PROTEST JAILING OF FOUR MONTREAL TRANSIT UNION WORKERS AND USE OF INJUNCTIONS IN LABOR DISPUTES; AND TO SUPPORT STRIKING WORKERS AT RADIO MUTUEL.

4. COMMENT: WHILE MANY CNTU MEMBERS SUPPORTED PQ IN LAST ELECTIONS, UNION ITSELF DID NOT ENDORSE PQ, AND VOTES WERE SEEN PRIMARILY AS PROTEST AGAINST LIBERALS. TONE OF CONVENTION INDICATES THAT PQ HAS MADE NO PROGRESS IN ATTRACTING CNTU TO ITS CAUSE. NEEDING LABOR SUPPORT FOR A REFERENDUM VICTORY, PQ THUS FINDS ITSELF IN STICKY POSITION. IT HAS TAKEN ACTION, SUCH AS BILL 45, TO INCREASE ITS APPEAL TO LABOR, BUT DOES NOT DARE TO GO TOO FAR FOR FEAR OF ALIENATING OTHER VOTERS, WHOSE

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PATIENCE HAS BEEN WORN THIN BY PAST ABUSES OF SYSTEM BY QUEBEC UNIONS. ABILITY OF PQ TO HANDLE FORTHCOMING NEGOTIATIONS WITH NURSES AND OTHER WORKERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR SHOULD GIVE EARLY INDICATION OF FUTURE COURSE OF PQ-LABOR RELATIONS. AS FOR DECISION TO DELAY STAND ON REFERENDUM, CNTU JOINS QUEBEC FEDERATION OF LABOR, WHICH DECIDED SEVERAL MONTHS AGO TO POSTPONE ISSUE FOR A LATER CONVENTION. BOTH QFL LEADER LOUIS LABERGE AND CNTU'S NORBERT RODRIQUE ARE WELL AWARE OF OBSTACLES INVOLVED IN ANY DISCUSSION ON QUEBEC'S INDEPENDENCE AND ARE IN NO HURRY TO COME TO GRIPS WITH ISSUE THAT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CREATE STRONG DIVISIONS WITHIN THEIR RANKS.

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